No. 3053

The Mission Study Class

What Is It?
How Organize It?

The Educational Department, Board of Missions, 281 Fourth Avenue, New York

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I. WHAT IS IT?

The mission study class, in its most approved and usual form, is a small group of persons who meet weekly for from six to ten sessions of not less than one hour each to study under a leader a text book relating to missions, home or foreign. It is not a lecture, nor a programme meeting, but a class in which all are expected to take part freely.

It does not interfere with any other agency. It rather helps to make other forms of missionary effort more effective. Nothing else will so prepare people to take an edifying part in missionary meetings, nothing else will make them so willing to serve on missionary committees or undertake other kinds of work for the cause. It takes time, it is true, but the time of only a few persons. It is not an additional congregational meeting. It asks us once or twice a year, in the season when we can best spare the time, to join a small group for a series of weekly meetings, held morning, afternoon or evening, as shall be most convenient, and continuing not over two months.

II. ITS PURPOSE

The purpose of the mission study class is not to provide a means whereby a number of people may acquire a lot of information about missions. Its

aim is deeper. Its purpose is intensive cultivation whereby a few individuals may be aroused so that they may become leaders in the church in the prosecution of the missionary enterprise. One intelligent and enthusiastic missionary worker is worth more to the cause than a score of ordinary lukewarm Christians. It is a sad fact that in most cases missionary sermons and meetings produce only a gentle warmth. We need something that will make at least a few persons boil over. These in turn will inspire the rest by personal contact. A dozen well-heated radiators will keep a whole house warm. The mission study class is the furnace that heats the radiators.

The ultimate aim of the study class is twofold, to aid in spreading the Kingdom of God in the world and to develop Christian character. Neither side of this aim can be secured without action. Spiritual life cannot grow without active obedience. Active obedience requires us to go and teach all nations. On the other hand, as our lives deepen we shall serve more gladly and effectively. This marks off the mission study class from a current-event club or a missionary meeting whose purpose is mere information. As a matter of fact, study classes have roused thousands of persons to study more intelligently, to pray more earnestly, to give more liberally, to serve the cause at home or to volunteer for the field. With some classes it may be wise not to announce these aims in advance, but they must be constantly kept in mind by the leader. The study class must never come together as a matter of mere routine, but always with the prayer that their deliberations may result in something tangible.

III. ITS REQUIREMENTS

If the mission study class yields greater results than do semi-annual missionary sermons, monthly

missionary meetings or desultory reading, it is because it demands more. It is not satisfied with methods that would be considered altogether inadequate in dealing with a secular subject. It requires: (*a*) a small group, so that each member shall feel quite at ease and be able therefore to express himself freely; (*b*) sessions at least weekly, so that consecutive work may be possible; (*c*) a single subject for each course, so that impressions may be definite; (*d*) preparation for each session on work assigned by the leader, so that habits of study may be formed; (*e*) free self-expression by the class, so that ideas may be thoroughly digested; (*f*) social sympathy, the contagion that comes from associating with others deeply interested in the same subject. If a group is small, it is more easily secured. If the meetings are weekly, the course is over so much the sooner. Short courses lasting from six to eight weeks have been found most practicable.

IV. THE WAY TO FORM ONE

1. *Promoter.* The first thing needed is an individual who believes that a mission study class ought to be organized and is willing to take some trouble to secure it. He or she should first approach those members of the parish that seem likely to respond. He should avoid, however, those who are already so loaded down with church work as to be unable to take hold with real earnestness. The thing most to be kept in mind in enlisting members is the work to be secured from them as a result of the course. Strike for young blood, for possible missionary workers and leaders, for those free to make their lives count for the spread of the Kingdom of God. Do not, however, despise material that seems unpromising.

A special effort should be made to secure Sunday-School superintendents and teachers. *The introduction of missions into the Sunday School will amount to little if the superintendent and teachers have no enthusiasm for the subject.*

The promoter must be a personal worker. He must put no confidence in announcements from the chancel or advertisements or messages as fit substitutes for personal contact. He must be enthusiastic and persuasive, but must never coax or worry persons into joining. He should explain fully what the scheme requires and what it promises, laying stress on the fact that it demands weekly meetings. He should know the great reasons for the study of missions. He should be prepared to pray out success.

When two or three besides the leader have been secured, the class becomes a possibility.

2. *Leader.* In most cases it is well to begin to search for a leader as soon as the idea of having a class is seriously considered. Once a leader is found the task is half begun. But remember that, inasmuch as your leader has a serious task to perform, he should be allowed three or four weeks in which to make ready.

The qualifications for a leader are: (*a*) deep earnestness and a real interest in the Kingdom. It is too much to expect a man or a woman who has not the cause at heart to have an effect upon the sentiments of the class. Whereas, on the other hand, it can be affirmed that any person who is thoroughly in earnest, *whether he know much or little*, can by his earnestness arouse the interest of others.

(*b*) As a second qualification, he should be possessed of love for others and common sense. The greatest expert can never do more than impart information unless he approaches his class with sympathy and tact. It is better to have as a leader a

person of mediocre intelligence, who knows how to get on with people, than an erudite scholar who does not possess the faculty of making people feel at home and at ease.

This is perhaps the most vital element in a successful leader. Anybody who is in earnest can learn enough in a month to lead others—and himself—into larger knowledge. We can perhaps sum up the whole matter thus: get for a leader some one who is *fond of people.* The secret of influencing others is the secret of loving others. No man can help caring for one who cares for him, and a class led by a man or a woman who really likes every member of that class and who is in earnest will seldom fail to be productive of results.

(*c*) The third qualification is that the leader should be willing and able to take time to prepare for each lesson. Avoid people who already have too many irons in the fire. A rector is seldom able to give the exact attention that is needed. Seek out some one who can give his whole attention to the class, and who is prepared to spend an hour or more on each session. Presidents of auxiliaries in large parishes generally have too many other details to handle, but, however that may be, remember that the mission study class leader should for the time being regard the class as his first and foremost occupation.

(*d*) The fourth requirement is a moderate amount of teaching ability. This has already been dwelt upon and implied, but something more should be added. In the first place, remember that mission teaching ability means common sense and love for one's neighbors and deep interest in the subject. With these to begin with the thing is three-quarters done. But in the second place, if feasible, some practical suggestions should be sought in such books as "The Point of Contact," by Patterson Du Bois;

"Talks to Teachers," by James; "The Mission Study Class Leader," by T. H. P. Sailer.

From such books, which can be ordered through your local book store, many practical suggestions which will be of value can be obtained.

Above all things, avoid teachers whose only method of imparting truth is to lecture or preach. The whole point and value of the class will be lost unless the members talk quite as much, if not *more*, than the leader. The explanation of this is that the class gathers to acquire interest and not information only, and we can never become interested in a thing until we have talked about it. For example, you go to a lecture and though you enjoy it you have not become as interested in the subject treated as you would have if you had spent the evening quietly discussing it. Just compare the amount of interest you have in a thing which you have heard some one else talk about with the interest you have in a thing about which you yourself have talked.

Now, just because people do not become really interested and alive to a subject until they have talked about it and expressed their own views upon it, and perhaps argued keenly for or against it; just because people are not actually awake to a subject until they have themselves discussed it, it is most important to avoid leaders who will not give the class all the opportunity they desire to talk and debate. *It is better to have a lively discussion over one point than to have no discussion and only a lecture over ten.* The class meets to gain enthusiasm. If it never gets beyond the first chapter of the text book but has become thoroughly excited over that, it would be better than to have it finish the book without becoming particularly interested in any part of it. So try and get for a leader one who is apt at drawing people out and who is able to preside over a discussion.

Then, finally, by presiding over a discussion is meant to keep it within profitable bounds. Whatever is debated should bear upon that phase of the extension of the Kingdom which is implied or dealt with in the chapter assigned for the lesson. The wise and efficient leader is the one that can guide, with a word here and a word there, the whole debate, so that it will come to a conclusion which will make for the progress of the Kingdom. That is to say, the leader should be sure to force the debaters to a conclusion. They should avoid endings nowhere! They should always sum up the results of their discussion, and it should be the aim of the leader to see that that conclusion is one which will be profitable, which shall have made the session worth while. It will profit little to conclude that Hinduism is decadent and foolish. It will profit much to conclude that Hinduism is so inferior to our faith that we ought to try in some way, to enlighten them "that sit in darkness."

And, next, a word about the training and raising up of leaders. Mission study is not the diversion of a single season, however, but a feature of church work that should become permanent, and with the future in view nothing is more important that to train well-equipped leaders. If no leader of experience can be had, the first class should be devoted mainly to the purpose of training one or more. It should be small, composed of sympathetic workers who wish to learn something of method, as well as of the subject, and who will take every opportunity to practice on one another. Such a class would be in many churches the most hopeful beginning that mission study could possibly have. Persons who have acquired experience must be followed up in the future and made to utilize it in leading new classes.

It will be a great help if the leader can be selected long enough in advance to attend a summer mis-

sionary conference or winter institute, where the methods and practice of teaching are illustrated by experienced teachers. If a normal class has been organized in the same city or town, he should make every effort to join it.

The best plan is for each class to have a single leader, so that the practice gained in one session may be turned to account in the next. Two persons working in close touch may do well, but dividing the sessions among several leaders is not to be recommended.

In order to help the leader a class secretary, who looks up absent members and sends them the assignments of the lesson, and does lookout work generally, is a valuable aid. An active librarian, who finds out what books are needed, brings them to the class sessions, hands those needed for reference to the members who have been assigned papers and circulates the more readable books among the other members, can be a source of blessing hardly second to a good leader.

3. *Course.* As soon as the leader is secured, the course should be selected in order that as much time as possible may be available for preparation. It is usually best to study the topic recommended for the year by the Educational Department of the Board, as the helps on this subject are most recent. The leader should write at once to the Educational Secretary for literature.

4. *Members.* The quality of the membership depends mainly on the activity and personal contact of the promoter. As stated above, those most likely to take hold earnestly should be approached first. It is often well to solicit some person who has an influence over a circle of others and to use the name as an advertisement. Avoid those incapable of strenuousness.

Classes should be small. Few leaders can do justice to more than twelve members at once. Six is an ideal number for a working class, if they all attend regularly. Rather than attempt to carry over fifteen members, it would be well to divide into two classes or to persuade some to wait until later in the year, when the course would be repeated for them.

If personal work fails to gather as many members as are desired, advertising should be employed. Ask your rector to explain and to commend the scheme from the chancel, and devote a meeting of the young people's society to the subject. Lay the matter strongly on the consciences of those present and plead with them to give themselves a chance to become intelligently interested in this great cause. Some carefully planned missionary meetings and the circulation of especially interesting missionary books may be necessary to induce persons to respond.

The requirements of active membership are regular attendance, barring accidents, and study of the assigned lesson at least one hour each week. It is taken for granted that each member shall own a text book, except where two or more live in the same household. Remember that some may refuse to join from sheer timidity, and therefore be encouraging but do not wreck the class by admitting those who have no intention of fulfilling the requirements. The latter may be invited to attend as visitors and may later be persuaded to become regular members.

5. *Meetings.* These should be *separate from any other meeting* except under the most desperate circumstances. If not, they are almost sure to be cramped for time or swamped by non-workers. They should *meet weekly* in order to maintain interest most effectively. Between sessions occurring

less frequently the thread of connection and spirit of enthusiasm is apt to be lost. Six meetings once a week consume no more time than six meetings of the same length once a month and are far more profitable. Besides, attendance is more apt to be regular. Frequent meetings may be said to be essential to the purpose of a mission study class. They should be *of sufficient length.* Many of the best classes have given an hour and a half to each session. It is none too much and often proves too little. An hour should be the minimum limit. Under any circumstances begin sharp on time, whether the class has fully assembled or not, and close with equal promptness.

Most of the text books contain either six or eight chapters, and it has become a convention to cover one chapter at each recitation. With so few meetings much must be omitted, but it is usually better, especially in a first attempt, to plan a short course. Members can be secured more easily and will be willing to attend more regularly for six meetings than for twenty. If a class is organized early in October it can complete its sessions before the Christmas holidays.

An excellent place for meeting is around a large table in a private house. If a table is not to be had, at least sit in a circle. It is better to meet in the same place each time.

6. *Organization Meeting.* Suggestions in regard to this meeting are given in the special helps on each course for the leader. The time at the regular session will be spent to far greater advantage if there has been a previous meeting of the class at which the division into regular members and visitors is finally made, the method of working fully explained and the assignment of the first lesson taken down in the note books. Copies of the text book should be

on hand for sale. The organization meeting may sometimes be combined with the meeting for advertisement mentioned above, but if it be hurried the session following will probably be a failure.

V. ITS METHODS

The best way in which to secure lasting impressions that shall lead to action is not a talk by the leader, nor a rote recitation on the text book, nor a series of papers, but a free discussion by the class of properly selected problems. The interest and profit of the discussion will depend largely on the judgment with which these problems have been chosen and formulated.

The formulation of problems is what is called the making of "assignments." This should be illustrated. Let us say that the chapter assigned for a lesson is upon the Religions of China. The class is not told, as is the case in a school, to be prepared to answer questions as to the *contents* of that chapter, they are not told to learn the names and doctrines of the several cults so that they may repeat to the leader the facts and figures enumerated in the chapter. What *is* done is to give the class certain problems suggested by the contents of the chapter with the request that they be prepared to discuss them. For example, when the class meets, instead of the leader asking: "Name the religions of China," he will state that the first topic to be discussed is the difference between religious conditions in America and China. In the discussion which follows the class will, of course, show at once that we have one and China three or four religions, and then further discussion will bring out the names and chief characteristics of those Eastern faiths. Then following this, the leader, instead of asking "What are the objections to Taoism?" will say: "We now come

to the second topic for discussion, which is: 'Why would you rather be a Christian than a Taoist?'" In the discussion which follows there will naturally emerge the objections to that pagan cult, but, more than this, there will emerge the realities of the situation in which they who profess it live.

Thus it will be seen that by such a system of topic discussions, or "assignments" as they are called, all the facts are brought out and a great deal more, since they are brought out *alive* instead of *dead*.

Now in teaching a class, the hardest thing to do is to prepare such assignments as will create interesting discussions and bring the subject matter of the chapter before the class in a living, vital way. The great thing to know about making assignments for a class is that they must be such as will suggest to the class a way in which that which is presented in the chapter can be seen in relation to their own experience.

The suggestions for leaders mentioned above contain assignments in this form to be given out each week, studied by the class by the help of the text book, and discussed at the following meeting. These assignments will need adaptation to certain classes, but they have been found a great help. These suggestions also outline the principal points of each discussion.

7. *A Typical Session.* The methods of the mission study class may perhaps best be presented by a sketch of a typical session.

The class gathers around a large table in a private house or parish house shortly before eight o'clock. On the wall hang a large map, a chart and a blackboard. Books obtained by the librarian for reference and circulation lie on the table.

As the hour strikes the leader offers a brief prayer. His words and manner indicate that he

is looking to God for real results. He begins with a few informal questions, that have nevertheless been carefully prepared to draw out special interests that have been aroused by the study of the past week, or special difficulties that have been met. The whole tone of the meeting is *not* that of a school recitation, but of a social gathering.

The leader asks one of the class to state clearly the first question to be discussed, and then calls on two or three other members in turn for their opinions. His manner is sympathetic and encouraging, and instead of criticising the views expressed he asks further questions which help the members to supplement and criticise them for themselves. One rather long-winded member starts a digression, but the leader courteously replies that there is not time to enter upon that point just now, and tactfully holds the class to the topic. Material from former lessons is constantly utilized in the discussion.

More obvious sides of the topic are drawn from two or three members who are less acute than the others and more apt to be embarrassed. No member is allowed to remain long in silence. At times the class discuss spontaneously, and then the leader wisely hold his peace, only interposing to keep them on the main track; at other times the discussion flags, and then the questioning powers of the leader are taxed. He does not hesitate to attack the views of the members in a good-natured way in order to stir them up in defense. After fifteen minutes, a paper bearing on the question just treated is sometimes called for and the class is now prepared to listen with interest to views of authorities whom the writer of the paper has consulted.

In order to give some practice in teaching, the conduct of the discussion on the next question may perhaps be assigned at the previous meeting to one

of the members. It may not be so well done as the leader could do it, but the class appreciate the difficulties of a first attempt and respond sympathetically. For the treatment of the third and last question the leader resumes control.

At ten minutes past nine the class join in summarizing what they consider the most important points brought out in the whole discussion. A few questions from the leader make clear to them, however, that what they have learned only leads to yet more interesting topics. The problems to be discussed at the next session are therefore taken down not as a task imposed by the leader, but as helpful suggestions for guidance in study. The leader now reads a passage of Scripture that enforces as nothing else can the phase of missions that has been discussed, and the session closes with two or three brief prayers by the class that show that their feelings have been stirred. Sharp at 9.30 everything is over and after a little social conversation the members depart.

On another evening twenty-five minutes is spent in a debate on a question adapted to this purpose. The members are assigned their sides at the preceding meeting. Each in turn is allowed two minutes for an opening talk and one minute on the second round. The order of speaking is set down on the blackboard and the leader holds a watch and cuts off each speaker sharp on time so that things are kept in a state of tension. The principal points scored by each side are summarized on the blackboard as they are brought forth, in order to avoid repetition and enable the opponents to see clearly what they must attack.

Much of the success of the meetings has depended on the arrangement of the material and preparation of *suggestive questions* by the leader, much on faith-

ful work and free participation on the part of the class, but all these have been only vehicles for great, burning ideas that have thus had free access to the minds and consciences of the members.

As the sessions continue, the earnestness of the leader becomes more infectious and his prayers are answered when several of the members volunteer at the close of the course to lead classes themselves.

VI. RESULTS

No one else gets so much good out of a study class as the leader. He has put the most study and prayer into the work; he derives the greatest benefit from it. Many persons who have hesitated to undertake leadership have testified that they were more than repaid. The leader will ever after have a more vital interest in the study he has taught, in the most effective methods of teaching, in the missionary development of the lives of the members of his class, in the welfare of the great missionary enterprise.

The members, like the leader, will profit in proportion to their work. Those who have been most earnest and prayerful in study and discussion will carry away the greatest personal blessing. They will find all missionary information in the future more interesting, because it is more or less intimately related to the subject they have studied. They will be far more likely to read missionary books and to join another class. Their gifts to missions will be more liberal, because they will appreciate the needs and uses for their money. Their prayer for missions will be more effective, because more intelligent and specific. They will be more ready to render service in missionary meetings and on committees. They will make use of their knowledge in conversation, in the Sunday School and perhaps in leading

classes themselves. Some at least will be more ready to hear the call for service on the foreign field. In years to come, they will give thanks in distant lands that God ever led them into a mission study class.

These results are not mere possibilities, but can be shown by testimonies to have been actually achieved. Your testimony may be better than anything that has yet been received.

The Educational Department has been created in order that the people of the church may be led in the systematic study of its task. The days of supporting the cause because we have had our emotions temporarily aroused by a passing missionary, or because our rector begs money out of us, or because we feel that our position in the community demands that we contribute so much—the day for supporting missions on such grounds are, thank God, passing. The only kind of effort and giving on our part which can be blessed is intelligent giving. If we are to win, every private in the rear rank of God's army must know what the warfare is about and how the campaign is progressing, and must be able and ready to add his intelligent help to them that are leading the way. The Educational Department exists to help church people then to know what and why and how the church is doing, and it is glad, so far as it is able, to answer all questions and render any kind of help.

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